

BOTANY

Down on the Greenbrier in Greenbrier County last fall, Harper M. Smith came across some bushes full of soft shell nuts about the size of filberts. New to him, we sent specimens over to Dr. Earle L. Core, of the Department and Zoology, at the University. He writes back they are buffalo nuts, *Pyralaria pubera*. I will write a paragraph on this buffalo nut, or elk nut, or oil nut, or rabbit wood soon, unless Dr. Core will consent to do it.

Over at Anthonys Creek some seasons ago a citizen killed a wild duck. In it he found a grain of "duck wheat." He planted it, and the season of 1939 he had a good crop. Some seed was brought to this printing office, and I sent it in to Dr. Core for identification. He writes back he is not so far able to give any information beyond the statement the seeds belong to some plant in the buckwheat family. No plants being available this time of year, he is raising some; he will be able to tell us before long. They are already showing above the ground.

Some months back, I published a letter from Dr. Core, in which he told of a visit to these mountains a century ago of Dr. Asa Gray, the tall scarecrow in botany. He reported finding the yellow gentian on Knapps Creek. It had not since been reported from here and Dr. Core wanted a specimen. Dr. Ben Roller, of White Sulphur Springs, saw the piece, and was reminded he had seen yellow gentian in Greenbrier County; so he sent in a specimen.

Dr. Core continues: Thanks a lot for the editorial on the University. It has caused a great deal of comment around here. I enjoyed it very much; especially the last paragraph where you say the more you are thrown with college professors the more highly you regard country school teachers. I take that as a compliment, because I am a country school teacher, since I teach botany which has to be taught in the country. I have taught in a one-room country school house, and I actually live at present in the open country twelve miles west of the University, on State 7. Doesn't that make me a country school teacher?

So sorry you were unable to get up to the herbarium while you were here. I would liked to have shown you around. Since you didn't get here I thought you might like a few notes concerning our activities. The herbarium was founded as a service to the people of the State so as to make comparisons in identification of materials sent in and for the collection of information regarding the plants of the State. We now have 60,000 specimens filed away here, representing virtually all the fungi, lichens, mosses, liverworts, ferns, and seed plants found in West Virginia, and, of course, many specimens of some of them. In addition, we have a specimen of almost every plant found in the range of Gray's Manual, the northeastern part of the United States; a large collection made by Dr. Small in the southeastern states, and listed in his big manual of that region; and the most common of the plants of the western states and Canada.

I am teaching Dendrology in our new Forestry Division and the Herbarium has been fortunate in having been designated as one of the 15 in the country to receive a complete set of specimens representing all the forest trees in the United States, the sets being prepared and distributed by the New York State College of Forestry. They are of great value in our Forestry work.

I must tell you about our publications. You already know about *Castanea*. In exchange for this periodical we receive about 100 botanical journals from all over the world. We are also publishing a series called "Contributions from the Herbarium of West Virginia University." Fifteen numbers in this series have been published or are in preparation. One of them, on the botanical exploration of West Virginia, I thought might prove of interest to you and so I am sending a copy of it under separate cover.

Best wishes for a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Sincerely,

Earl.

I must say to Dr. Core, I am no hand to find joy in dissecting my own feeble jests. However, in the cause of science I will expose the weak comment on the college professors since it now appears to be somewhat involved. The key verse is that bit of scriptural truth, "By their fruits you shall know them." Nearly all the college professors of my acquaintance are country bred and the product of country schools, where taste for culture was imbibed from and cultivated by country teachers. This interpretation and explanation ought to be within mental grasp of even a college professor, as high compliment to the producer and his product.

Delighted I am over world recognition of the botany publications of the University. I am reminded of the much ado over nothing in the legislature a few years ago, wherein our head school got its usual smear of adverse publicity. The asking for buying technical publications was a sum about five times as large as the big northern university spent for this purpose. Some smarties found this out and how they did romp around on it until explained the big school had publications to exchange the world over for the books and papers our University had to buy, if obtained. The facts of the situation never overtook the widespread intimation of things not being on the level up at Morgantown.

At the same time and place, there was the mixup over the the one by one grape sticks for the experimental farm. The asking was for red wood, at a cost higher than the local market on oak or chestnut sticks. What a tempest raged in the teapot over this until it was explained this was a part of a nation wide demonstration carried on by land grant colleges to ascertain the relative values of different woods for grape sticks for the information of grape growers.

The moral to all this is that it behooves every mother's son of us to inform ourselves about our University, so we can inform others. We have the old thing; we can't get rid of it and so we will have to make the most of it, to serve better the interest of our state and humanity in general.

Dear Mr. Price:

When we read your Field Notes, it recalled an incident, which coincides with your reference to bears killing coons. Heretofore we have refrained from disclosing our experience to anyone because it did seem far fetched.

In 1933 we were hunting near the head of Mill Creek in Randolph County when we were stopped suddenly by a strange noise. After a careful investigation we discovered a bear under a large beech tree. We stood still in order to ascertain the source of the noise, whereupon we saw another bear up in the tree shaking a limb and on the limb was a full grown coon. The coon was making quite a fuss which had been the noise attracting our attention. The bear finally shook the coon off the limb and as he hit the ground the other bear made a desperate effort to catch him but failed. The only thing we could figure it was a trick formulated by the two bears for catching coons.

We were unsuccessful in getting either bear since we were so amazed by the sight we had seen.

Two of Your Readers.

Pocahontas

Chapter 3

Clark Wooddell shot and killed the wild dog, coyote or what it is which has been denning up under a hay stack on Judge Sharp's farm near Hillsboro. On last Wednesday Will Clutter brought the carcass to town, and Marvin Wimer has the skin in soak, preparatory to mounting it. For some time the animal has been known to keep in the Levels; dozens of shots have been taken at it, and dogs have run it out of the country. The color was a dark brindle, with a bushy tail; weight about 30 pounds. It was a male and about seven or eight years old. The neck was remarkably thick and strong for so small an animal; head and jaws heavy; muzzle gray from age. Lacking the erect ears and pointed nose of the coyote, I put the varment down as a dog which went wild. Mr Wooddell tells me the animal looked much more like a dog when it was dead than when it was alive.

Speaking about wild dogs, Uncle B'b Gibson was over from Elk last Wednesday, and he told me about a wild dog his grandfather, the late David Gibson tamed seventy or eighty years ago. This wild dog was found to be denning up under a hay stack. Snares were set, and the wild dog was caught. For some time the animal remained aloof from all advances, but it finally responded to kindness and through the influence of the other dogs. The wild dog was a female and showed gray hound blood to a marked degree. She proved the best of hunters and was a bear dog without a peer. She would chase a bear without giving voice and was a natural heeler. She would nip a bear until he could stand the punishment, no longer and must turn and fight his tormentor. Then she would stand aside until the bear made off again, and then she was nipping his heels again.

Talking about bears, one powerful big old bear is wandering the winter through on the Alleghanies around the head of Meadow Creek. One day last week Ira King and others gave him an all day chase in the snow. Evidently being chased by dogs was no new thing for this bear, for it was a running fight all day long. He would neither go up a tree nor stand and fight long enough for the men to come up. Mr King and their experienced bear hunters say this bear leaves the biggest track they have ever seen.

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- Pocahontas

Times

1/14/40

Pacabontas - 7

Pacabontas

Chapter 3

FIELD NOTES

On last Wednesday morning June Mann and other workers on a log skidder on Middle Mountain of Elk got a good look at a big wolf. The varment was seen near the log pile, and only moved off when June called to other members of the crew to see what he was looking at. He tells me the wolf looked like a German police dog, only taller, longer and more slender. The tail was bushy, and a big white streak extended over its back. The wolf looked big enough to weigh eighty or more pounds. For a year or more a wolf or rather wolves have been killing sheep on the head branches of the Elk.

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James A. Sharp, from Jericho road, was in Saturday afternoon, and told me about trailing a wolf in Buckley Mountain some fifty odd years ago. A big wolf had killed a sheep for the late Andrew McLaughlin. The neighborhood combined in the hunt, and the wolf whipped out the hounds. The hunt was quit at dark on a ridge overlooking the town. Word was sent to Mr. Sharp to bring his hounds the next morning. He took the trail of the wolf at daylight and followed it all day in Buckley Mountain. Late in the day the wolf crossed Knapps Creek, near Mt. View Cemetery. That night it killed a sheep at Mt. View Orchard on Marlin Mountain. The next day the Thorny Creek people put dogs on the trail for an all day chase. That night the wolf killed a sheep for Amos Dilley. Poison was put in the carcass and the next night the wolf came back to his kill. It was his last meal, for he died in the fence a few yards away.

} Poison
wolf

- Pacabontas Times

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CALVIN W. PRICE, EDITOR

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1940

The census of 1840 gave Pocahontas county a population of 2922. Of these 2703 were white and 219 colored. The returns on the 1940 census are not by me as I write, but the total is around 14,000; about five fold increase in a century, with the ratio between the races remaining about the same.

In 1840 there were in Pocahontas County 7,000 head of cattle, 10,000 sheep and 5,000 hogs, according to the census.

According to the assessor's returns for 1940, there were in Pocahontas county on January 1, cattle, 10,964; sheep, 29,549; and hogs, 3101.

For further comparison, I happen to know the assessor's returns for the year 1918—cattle, 11,446; sheep, 28,159; swine 4,446.

There is something alarming in the figures for the two years, 1840 and 1940, when you take in consideration that the future of this Pocahontas county rests upon the production of livestock. A century ago, three thousand people had seven thousand head of cattle; now fourteen thousand people have eleven thousand cattle. We have made a little progress in sheep. The increase here has been three fold as compared with five fold for people.

One reason the sparsely settled county of Pocahontas had such large herds and flocks a century ago may be in the history of the western range. Then the great plains supported millions of heads of buffalo, and there was no competition with the east in the production of livestock. No property interest was represented in the buffalo, and they fell before the guns of the hide hunters. The range was left for cattle. Economists have pointed out time and again that if the vast herds of buffalo had been preserved there would have been no room for settlers in the west. Where a million head of buffalo traveled up or down through a strip of country, the ground was bare of grass. These animals multiplied so, starvation was the only thing to set the limit.

The real sufferers from the extinction of the buffalo lived in Pocahontas and similar counties of the east. They never knew what hurt them. With the buffalo gone, the raising of wild cattle came into existence. This cheap beef hit the eastern stock grower a bad blow which about put him out of business. On the range cattle matured with little more care than is given wild animals. The only owner ship recognized was that evidenced by a brand.

In the east cattle were raised by the sweat of the brow, on high cost and high taxed land. In the west, with the buffalo gone, there was hardly end to possibilities of the number of wild cattle. There would be two roundups a year. In the spring to brand the calves; in the fall to cut out beef cattle for market. It is no wonder the east was forced out of the cattle business when came the competition of the boundless west.

As example of what is possible in wild cattle take the treeless plains of South America. In the 1550's a bull and seven cows were brought from Spain. From these sprang the millions and millions of wild cattle of the South American pampas. Except for the buffalo, the same condition would have prevailed in North America. There never was a time when the wild cattle of South America did not yield readily to domestication. For many generations they were hunted for their hides alone, as was the buffalo of the north. However, whenever it was considered worth while to corral wild cattle, it was found that in a short time they become accustomed to the control of man.

Australia and New Zealand had the same experience with range cattle. It is small wonder that beef from the west and the south and down under made the eastern cattle raiser live hard. But this eastern American is a thrifty soul. Those who stayed at home depended upon a diversity of crops, and the others went west to engage in the cattle business.

Back in the 1870's, Editor Horace Greeley uttered some careless words which became a slogan: "Go west young man, grow up with the country." Millions acted upon his advice and when they went they went to stay the result is a rich and populous west. The conditions in the west are more nearly approaching those in the east each year and so the handicap under which the eastern cattle man has labored for three generations is growing lighter.

When the waves of buffalo receded from the western plains, the steer advanced. Soon they had replaced the buffalo. Then the Pocahontas county stockman found himself up against it. He could not even turn to the production of butter and cheese, as the cattlemen of New York and other states did. In those days nothing could be marketed from Pocahontas which could not walk out on its own feet to the rail head. The way out in these blue grass valleys was found. By taking care a domesticated animal could be raised that commanded a far better price than the range cattle of the west. They set about to improve the breed; thus export cattle were produced which brought a living for the care expended.

Let me here interline the remark that about a quarter of a century back changes began to come about in the economic scheme of world affairs, and the demand for big export cattle declined and went out. It marked decline in the quality of our cattle, so carefully and laboriously brought up to such high standard of excellence in the two generations following the war between the states.

In Tuckahoe Virginia, where the winters are mild, there persisted the practice of raising unimproved cattle. The penny royal bull of the old days was a term of reproach in grazing countries, and referred to the class of cattle found in the flat lands of Eastern Virginia. Another term I have

have not heard in years was a four old yearling, meaning a steer four years of age and the size of a yearling. Another illustration of the cheap cattle of the lowlands was that a steer was so small that he could be salted in his horns.

The existence of low grade Tuckahoe cattle was a constant menace to the breeders of the mountain valleys of the Shenandoah, Greenbrier, Potomac and Tygarts. The pennyroyal bull became much dreaded and feared. Cattle seemed to be peculiar among animals in that they breed true to the sire and not to the dam. So it can be seen the aversion to the pennyroyal bull was well founded. The passes of the mountains were well watched to keep him on his side of the divide. A bunch of sinewy steers could be driven to the grass in the highlands without causing concern. If there were bulls and heifers in the bunch, the close watch was kept on the herds, so the interlopers could be worked out of the country by moral suasion and other lawful means.

The English custom was firmly fixed here—that of seeing families with one cow or more, who made no pretention to herds, were given opportunity to raise purebred stock.

The four year old export steer was the sacred ox in these mountains; held sacred to the purpose for which he was created; and went to the large city market for beef. So far as I know, there never was a standard four year old steer butchered and eaten in Pocahontas county. Tradition has it, a peculiar man in Greenbrier county, deciding that the best was as good as any, butchered a couple of export steers for the home market. He like to have ruined his business, for his customers ever after demanded the kind of beef he furnished while these export steers lasted.

Pocahontas - 7